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SUBJECT: (S) ISRAELI VIEWS ON PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI SECURITY NEGOTIATIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (S) On instructions from Defense Minister Mofaz, BG Eitan Dangott briefed the Ambassador March 11 on the status of Israeli-Palestinian security negotiations and other issues discussed in the Sharm el-Sheik summit. Dangott said that Mofaz and the Israeli security establishment are becoming increasingly frustrated with the Palestinians' negotiating behavior.

2. (S) Dangott recalled Mofaz's meeting several weeks ago with Mohammed Dahlan in which Dahlan had laid down two principles that would be important for the Palestinians in the transfer of security responsibilities in the West Bank: Palestinians wanted not only the cities to be transferred, but also the areas surrounding the cities; and the Palestinians did not want the Israeli army to surround the cities as it had done in the summer of 2003. Dangott said that Mofaz and Dahlan had discussed this in some detail and had agreed that these were achievable outcomes. Dahlan had also understood from Mofaz that the focus was not going to be on areas A, B or C, and that the outcome would not be defined at this time as a return to the situation that existed before September 2000.

3. (S) Since then, each time Israeli and Palestinian security negotiators have sat to discuss the transfer of security in Jericho and/or Tulkarm, they have approached agreement only to have the situation reversed when the issue was submitted to the Palestinian political level. Dangott said the latest setback occurred this week when Hajj Ismail told his Israeli counterpart that his new instructions were to insist on Route 90 (in the Jordan Valley) being seen as a "international road" on which travelers from the northern West Bank would be free to move to the southern West Bank without any hindrance by Israeli security elements. Hajj Ismail further said that the objective he was asked to achieve was to emphasize that the Jordan Valley belongs to the Palestinians.

4. (S) Dangott said that Hajj Ismail's position is all the more disturbing in that it followed the meeting early this week between Mofaz and Palestinian President Abbas. During that meeting, Abbas had emphasized the importance of achieving a successful outcome in the cities and had expressed confidence that agreements reached between military commanders would be acceptable to the political echelons on both sides. Dangott added that the role played by Interior Minister Nasir Yousef in these meetings was less helpful, and that Yousef appeared very unfamiliar with the details that were under discussion between the military commanders.

5. (S) Dangott said that Mofaz is insistent on trying to make this work, even though the Israelis are not persuaded that Palestinian security forces are ready to assume their responsibilities in the cities. New commanders have not been appointed, and Palestinian forces have not started training in the Jericho area, which Israel had told the Palestinians would be permitted. This has led to a suspicion on the part of Israeli analysts that Palestinians have become comfortable with the failure of the negotiations in that they are able to blame Israel for failure to implement the Sharm el-Sheik understanding.

6. (S) The Ambassador suggested that Mofaz reach out to Palestinian Interior Minister Yousef to try to break the deadlock. He noted that all of us have been seeking an empowered Palestinian security interlocutor, and we now have one. Mofaz's insistence on meeting President Abbas earlier in the week was positively motivated, but it may have been seen by Yousef as undercutting his authority. Thus, there is an opportunity now not only to help bolster Yousef's authority, but perhaps also to yield progress in the security negotiations. The Ambassador said that if Mofaz agreed that the next step should be a meeting with Yousef, our Consul General and General Ward would meet with Yousef in order to frame the agenda and possible outcomes of the meeting in the best manner possible. Dangott pushed back, saying that if the negotiations were not succeeding with President Abbas as an interlocutor, it was unlikely that Yousef's participation would help. However, he undertook to raise with Mofaz the Ambassador's strong suggestion that an early meeting be

sought with Nasir Yousef in order to give new impetus to the negotiations.

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KURTZER